

Participatory Innovation: A Pedagogical Approach To Help Students Reveal Real-World Problems

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In the digital sector, ‘innovation’ is a frequently overused word. Entrepreneurs worldwide are trying to innovate within their market. However, the drive for innovation can blind the creators of these products, obscuring what people actually need and want to use. Countless applications struggle or outright fail because they are created without the user in mind. Digital technology can be a powerful tool in people’s everyday life but it has to be integrated in meaningful ways. Careful consideration must be placed on how these new products will integrate—and improve—life. When new products truly help people, they are more likely to resonate and succeed; this is real innovation. Everyone involved in the production of digital products—entrepreneurs, developers, and experience or visual designers (the focus of this project)—must abide by this philosophy in order for the product to be successful.

Students who are preparing to be involved with the design or production of these products need to learn ways to more deeply understand their users, identify problems, and craft meaningful solutions. With this in mind, research was conducted to identify and test methods that allow students to acquire this deeper understanding. This poster will outline one pedagogical approach which utilizes participatory design methods to help students identify problems in people’s lives. For this research, visual communication design students utilized these methods in a project for the course *Visual Design for the Web*. An overview of the pedagogical approach, project, student outcomes, and implications for future work will be highlighted.